

[Tom Simmons]

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[???] Interview [9?]

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Tarrant co., Dist., #7

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Tom Simmons, 77, living at the Westbrook Hotel, Fort Worth, Texas was born Aug., 4, 1861 in the State of Mississippi, where he received his education and studied law. After he was graduated, he came to Texas, which was in 1884, to establish a law practice. He settled in the Town of Decatur, Wise co., where he practiced his profession until the Ft. W. & D.C. railroad built through the town. Shortly thereafter, he moved to Fort Worth, Texas, where he lived and made his home since. He now is living a retired life. When Tom Simmons arrived at Decatur, the town was a thriving frontier business center. Cattlemen and settlers living in the territory extending for more than 100 miles W. and N. of town came there to trade. He saw freight wagons numbering into the hundreds coming and leaving the town each day. He has seen hundreds of cattle herds which were driven through the town on their way to the [Northern?] ranges and the markets. He has seen and observed the difficulties the ranchers and early settlers had to meet.

His story of range days follows:

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"My birth place is [Miss.?], and the event took place Aug 4, 1861. There is where I was reared and received my education. I choose law as my profession. After I was graduated I came to Texas, to establish my practice.

"I located in Decatur, Wise co., in 1884 and put up a sign. Clients began to engage me within a few days after I open my office, and it was not long until I had an excellent practice. I prospered at my law practice in Decature till the days I left there, which was in [1899?].

"When I settled in Decatur there was no railroad running through the town. Fort Worth, was the nearest railroad town. Before the railroad entered Decature it was a thriving frontier town. C12 - 2/11/41 - Texas 2 There/ were 22 attorneys practicing there then and now there are about seven. The same comparation can be made for other professions and the various other lines of business.

"Decature was the trade center for a territory extending for more than 100 miles N. and W. of the town. There were ox and mule hauled freight wagons arriving and departing in large numbers steadily each day. Often one would see a 100 or more freight wagons at one time in the wagon yard. Some brought commodities and some were loading with goods for W. and N. sections.

"Almost each hour of the day, one could look to the N. or S. and see a cloud of dust arising into the air, which was caused by herds of cattle approaching or leaving the town. Some of these cattle were being transfered to the ranges N. of us and some were being driven to the markets.

"These herds were driven by such drovers as James Pettus, James Hicky, Ellison and Dowers, Millet and Groin, [Delworth?] and Littlefield and others. Some of these herds would drift on past the town without stopping, while others bedded for the night near the Trinity River W. of Decatur.

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"The town was never without more or less cowboys, who were a ending a few hours in relaxation there.

"Decatur, at the time, provided the necessary places to give a varity of amusement for the visitors. Some of it was a little 3 rough, but considering the [motely?] crowd that visited Decatur, we managed to get along without any serious trouble during my stay there.

"During the period of my arrival in Decatur, Indian and other troubles were quite well in hand. As I recall, about the last Indian raid happened a year or so before my arrival.

"The Babbs family were the victims of this last raid. Their home was destroyed and two small children were carried away.

"A man named Pickell, we called him Old Pickell, got the Babbs's children back about the time I settled in Decatur. He traded goods for the children and he told me how the transaction was conducted. He stated that he was not allowed to see the children until the bargain was completed. After old Pickell had delivered the amount and the kind of goods agreed upon, as the purchase price, the parties to the transaction seated themselves in a circle and a pipe of peace was smoked. With this ceremony completed, the children were brought from their hiding place and delivered to him.

"These [two?] children were stolen when they were three and four years old. During the two years or so they lived with the Indians, they were taught to and did become wary of the white people. Pickell related the children's action, saying they hid behind the squaws and had to be forced to go with Pickell.

"At the time I settled in Wise, co., there were a large number of turkeys raised in the surrounding settlements, and Fort Worth, was the market for the turkeys. I have seen [?] numbering into the hundreds, being driven by men on foot with Fort Worth, 4 as their destination. The [?] Pa king Co., was the buyer. Levy [Prentic?] was their agent and he

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went through the country buying the turkeys. He had the fowls delivered to Decatur, and from there they were driven to Fort Worth. The drive would take about three days.

“During those days, the country around Decatur contained a large number of settlements, but cattle ranches still existed. The locations of the cowcamps, for the most part, were N. and W. of the town.

“The practical fencing wire was placed on the market during the early '80s. Therefore, ranchers began to fence the ranges. A large number of the cowcamps moved their herds elsewhere. Mostly, they moved to the W. and N. where open range conditions still existed.

“Among the most [promanent?] ranchers in the Wise co., section was the waggoners. Dan Waggoner built a [magnificant?] home in Decatur. It was one of the show places of the town. In fact, there were very few houses in this section of the country which equaled it those days.

“Dan hired a New York architect to plan and supervise the erection of the home, at a cost of about \$40,000. It was in this home that W. T. Waggoner, was reared, and where his sons, Paul and Guy were born. The home was maintained for years after the family moved away from Decatur. Then it passed into the hands of other owners, but later W. T. Waggoner bought it, and there Tom would go week ends, also, for several weeks during each summer, for the sake of reminiscence. 5 “When the Denver railroad built through Decatur and traversed the the trade territory of Decatur, I preceived it would have an adverse effect on the town's business, because the road would eliminate the need of the population N. and W. of Decatur coming to the town for their commodities. I decided to move.

“I was not opposed to the coming of the road. In fact, I made a trip to Chicago, as a representative of Wise co., citizens, to urge the location of the road through the town. In behalf of the citizens, I offered the company free right-of-way through the county.

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"Some of my personal friends, among whom were the Waggoners, argued against me leaving the town for a new location. However, I followed my own idea about the matter, and moved to Fort Worth. It was not long until many of my friends followed me, and among whom were the waggoners, because of lack of business.

"The business that came to Decatur, prior to receiving the railroad, went to the numerous towns which were built along the railroads route.

"I learned to know intimately, a great number of the ranchers of the early days. Especially the Waggoners, because I married a Halsel, a niece of Mrs Tom Waggoner. Tom Waggoner was one of the truly big men whom I have known. He was a diamond in the rough. He was sociable and charitable and never turned his back on a friend in need.

I know of many incidents when Tom was called out for donations to buy, build some thing or to assist some individual. He often would inquire about the total cost of the proposition desired to be accomplished. When he was informed of the cost he would write a check for the total amount. He always accompanied his donations with a request that his act be kept a secret.

"I know of a church organ in Fort Worth, which he bought and the committee asked only for a donation. I know of numerous incidents, when friends of a former acquaintance of Tom's called on him to make a contribution towards making up a sum for the purpose of sending the party to a health institution or for some other worthy cause. When Tom learned what the total cost was he wrote a check for the entire amount.

"Many people have the idea that Tom bet on horse races, because he built the Arlington Downs racing plant, but the fact is he never bet a dollar on a horse race. He was fond of thoroughbred/ horses, as well as other stock, and his greatest pleasure was obtained/ by watching a horse race.

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[Porker?] playing was the universal sport of the range world. but Tom was an exception to the rule. He would not play cards for money. In fact he would not engage in gambling games. When he engaged in a game, it was for amusement and not to make money. Another trait very pronounced with in Tom Waggoner, was his liberality with guest. If one accepted an invitation to be Tom's guest at a convention or or for a visit some where, Tom would insist on paying all expenses, including all treats. He took pleasure in entertaining his friends, and did a great amount of it. 7 "I arrived in Decatur with only my diploma and good intentions, and succeeded in my endeavors. Those days people accepted a man's word, and if a man was true to his word, he could make his way easily. Many settlers arrived with only a saw and hammer. These tools they used to build a cabin. These people made a living and accumulated land and a home.

I bought land near the town of Decatur for the sum of [?] an acre. With land selling at this price, and some less, it did not require any great amount of money to acquire a home. With a home, a man was assured of a living for his family. By cultivating a small tract of land, the necessary vegetables and grain could be raised to supply a family. In the woods lived an abundance of ediable game, also, beef which settler could have for the trouble of going after it. Very few, if any, ranchers cared about a settler taking a yearling for their home beef supply.

"There was always jobs for those looking for work. Some rancher was in town each day inquiring for a cowhand, and freighters wanting hands. Therefore, we had [no?] hungry folks.